

*Continued from page 7*

wondered? Without doubt Hauck and Brokaw were now armed with the rifles of the men who had fallen, and he had six to deal with. Cautiously he thrust the muzzle of his gun through the crack and watched his chance, aiming a foot and a half above the spot where a pair of shoulders and a head would appear in a moment.

His chance came, and he fired. The head and shoulders disappeared, and with an exultant cry he swung his rifle a little to the right and sent another shot as the second man exposed himself. He too disappeared, and David's heart was thumping wildly in the thought that his bullets had reached their marks, when both heads appeared again and a hail of lead spattered against the cabin. The men among the rocks were no longer aiming at the door, but at the spot from which he had fired, and a bullet ripped through so close that a splinter stung his face and he felt the quick, warm flow of blood down his cheek. When the girl saw it her face went white.

"I can't get them with this gun, Marge," he groaned. "It's wild—wild as a hawk! Good God!"

A crash of fire had come from behind the cabin, and another bullet, finding one of the gaping cracks, passed between them with a sound like the buzz of a monster bee. With a sudden cry he caught Marge in his arms and held her tight. "Is it possible—they would kill you to get me?"

He loosed his hold of her, sprang to the broken stove, and began dragging it out of the line of fire that came through the door. The girl ran to help him. He had no time to urge her back. In ten seconds he had the stove close to the wall, and almost forcibly he made her crouch down behind it.

"If you expose yourself for one second I swear to heaven I'll stand up there against the door until I'm shot!" he threatened.

DAVID'S brain was afire. He was no longer cool or self-possessed. He was blind with a wild rage, with a mad desire in some way to reach with his vengeance those human beasts.

He rushed to the side of the cabin from which the fresh attack had come, and glared through one of the embrasures between the logs. He was close to Tara, and he heard the low, steady thunder that came out of the grizzly's chest. His enemies were near on this side; their fire came from the rocks not more than a hundred yards away. And all at once, in the heat of the great passion that possessed him now, he became suddenly aware that they knew the only weapons he possessed were Nisikoo's little rifle and Hauck's revolver. Probably they knew also how limited his ammunition was. And they were exposing themselves. Why should he save his last three shots? When they were gone and he no longer answered their fire, they would probably rush the cabin, beat in the door, and then—the revolver!

He saw Hauck, and fired. A man stood up within seventy yards of the cabin a moment later, firing as fast as he could pump the lever of his gun; and David drove one of Nisikoo's partridge-killers straight into his chest. He fired a second time at Hauck—another miss—and flung the useless rifle to the floor as he sprang back to Marge.

"Got one. Five left. Now—damn 'em—let them come!"

He drew Hauck's revolver. A bullet flew through one of the cracks, and they heard the soft thud of it as it struck Tara. The growl in the grizzly's throat burst forth in a roar of thunder. In response to that cry of animal rage and pain, a snarl had come from Baree. He had slunk close to Tara.

"Didn't hurt him much," said David, with the fingers of his free hand crumpling the girl's hair. "They'll stop shooting in a minute or two, and then—"

Straight into his eyes from that farther

wall a splinter hurled itself at him with a hissing sound like the plunge of hot iron into water. He had the lightning impression of seeing the bullet as it tore through the clay between two of the logs. He knew that he was struck, yet he felt no pain. His mind was acutely alive, yet he could not speak. His words had been cut off, his tongue was powerless.

THE girl did not know that he was hit for a moment or two. The thud of his revolver on the floor filled her eyes with the first horror of understanding, and she sprang to his side as he swayed like a drunken man toward Tara. He sank down on the floor a few feet from the grizzly, and he heard the girl moaning over him and calling him by name. The numbness left him, and slowly he raised a hand to his chin, filled with a terrible

rush of a great body—and with that thunder of Tara's rage and vengeance there mingled a hideous, wolfish snarl from Baree. He could see nothing. Hauck's hands were at his throat. But the screams continued, and above them came now the cries of men—cries of horror, of agony, of death; and as Hauck's fingers loosened at his neck he heard with the snarling and roaring and tumult the crushing of great jaws and the thud of bodies.

Hauck was rising, his face blanched with a strange terror. He was half up when a gaunt, lithe body shot at him like a stone flung from a catapult, and Baree's inch-long fangs sank in his thick throat in one savage snap of the jaws.

David raised himself, and through the horror of what he saw the girl ran to him, unharmed, and clasped her arms about

as she looked at him with eyes that were limpid pools of blue, out of which her terror was slowly dying away.

She whispered his name. In her look and that whisper there was unutterable adoration. It was for him she had been afraid. She was looking at him now as one saved to her from the dead, and he felt the thrilling pressure of her hands at his blood-stained cheeks.

A sound behind them turned his head, and fifty feet away he saw the big grizzly ambling cumbrously from the cabin. They could hear him growling as he stood in the sunshine, his head swinging slowly from side to side like a monstrous pendulum—in his throat the last echoing of that ferocious rage and hate that had destroyed their enemies. And in the same moment Baree stood in the door, his lips drawn back and his fangs gleaming, as if he expected other enemies to face him.

Quickly David drew the girl beyond the boulder from behind which he had opened the fight, and down on to a soft carpet of grass thick with the blue of wild violets. The big rock shut out the cabin from their vision.

"Rest here, little comrade," he said, "I must return to the cabin. Then—we will go."

"Go!"

She repeated the word in the strangest, softest whisper he had ever heard, as if in it all at once she saw the sun and stars, the day and night, of her whole life. She looked from his face down into the valley, and into his face again.

"We—will go," she repeated, as he rose to his feet.

She shivered when he left her, shuddered with a little cry which she tried to choke back even as she visioned the first glow of that wonderful new life that was dawning for her. David knew why. He left her without looking down into her eyes again, anxious to have these last terrible minutes over with. At the open door of the cabin he hesitated, a little sick at what he knew he would see. And yet, after all, it was no worse than it should be: it was justice. He told himself this as he stepped inside.

It was Henry's rifle he picked up. He searched for cartridges then. It was a sickening task. He found nearly fifty of them on the three, and went out with the pack and the gun. He put the pack over his shoulders before he returned to the rock, and paused only for a moment when he rejoined the girl. With her hand in his, he struck down into the valley.

"A great justice has overtaken them," he said, and that was all he told her.

AT the edge of the green meadows below they stopped where a trickle of water from the mountain-tops had formed a deep pool, and, following this trickle a little up the coulee it had worn in the course of the ages, David found a sheltered spot and stripped himself. To the waist he was covered with the stain and grime of battle.

In the open pool Marge bathed her face and arms, and then sat down to finish her toilet with David's comb and brushes. When he returned to her she was a radiant glory in the gold and brown fires of her disentangled hair. He stood a step off and looked at her, his heart filled with a wonderful joy, his lips silent. He watched her unseen as she ran out her glowing tresses under the strokes of his brush.

And once—ages ago, it seemed to him now—he had thought that another woman was beautiful, and that another woman's glory was her hair! He felt his heart singing. She had not been like this. No. Worlds separated those two—that woman and this God-crowned little mountain flower who had come into his heart like the breath of a new life, opening for him new visions that reached even beyond the blue skies. And he wondered that she should love him.

She looked up suddenly and saw him standing there. Love? Had he in all his life dreamed of the look that was in her face now? It made his heart choke him. He held open his arms silently as she rose to her feet, and she came to him in all that



"She came to him in all the burnished beauty of her unbound hair, and he held her close in his arms."

fear. It was there—his jaw, hard, unsmashed, but wet with blood. He thought the bullet had struck him there.

"A knockout," were his first words, spoken slowly and thickly, but with a great gasp of relief. "A splinter hit me on the jaw. I'm all right."

He sat up dizzily, with the girl's arm about him. In their three or four minutes of forgetfulness neither had noticed that the firing had ceased. Now there came a tremendous blow at the door. It shook the cabin. A second blow, a third—and the saplings crashed inward.

David struggled to rise, fell back, and pointed to the revolver.

"Quick—the gun—"

With a gasping cry, Marge sprang to it. The door crashed inward as she picked it up; and scarcely had she faced about when their enemies were rushing in, with Henry and Hauck in their lead, and Brokaw just behind them.

With a last effort, David fought to gain his feet. He heard a single shot from the revolver, and then, as he rose staggeringly, he saw Marge fighting in Brokaw's arms. Hauck came for him, the demon of murder in his face; and as they went down he heard scream after scream come from the girl's lips: "Tara! Tara! Tara!"

Over him he heard a sudden roar, the

him, her lips sobbing all the time: "Tara—Tara—Tara—" He turned her face to his breast, and held it there.

It was ghastly. Henry was dead. Hauck was dead. And Brokaw was dead—a thousand times dead—with the grizzly tearing at his huge body. Out of that pit of death David stumbled with the girl. The fresh air struck their faces. The sun of day fell upon them. The green grass and the flowers of the mountain were under their feet. They looked down the slope, and saw disappearing over the crest of the coulee two men who were running for their lives.

IT may have been five minutes that David held the girl in his arms, staring down into the sunlit valley into which the last two of Hauck's men had fled; and during that time he did not speak, and he heard only her steady sobbing. He drew into his lungs deep breaths of the invigorating air, and he felt himself growing stronger as the girl's body became heavier in his embrace, and her arms relaxed and slipped down from about his shoulders.

He raised her face. There were no tears in her eyes, but she was still moaning a little, and her lips were quivering like a crying child's. He bent his head and kissed them, and she caught her breath

*Continued on page 14*